

February 3, 2006
Invitation to a Demonstration
The World Can't Wait

By DANIEL ELLSBERG

I would not have thought of copying the Pentagon Papers, risking a possible lifetime in prison, without the example of thousands of young Americans who were doing everything they could--including non-violent disobedience to the draft regulations--to oppose a wrongful, hopeless war. They showed civic courage, and I can attest to its effectiveness; as a government consultant and former official, I felt its power on my own life.

In the face of a president blatantly violating the law, pursuing another stalemated, hopeless, wrongful war, and proclaiming his intent to continue both, civic courage is needed today from those who can hold him and his administration to account: members of Congress, journalists, potential whistleblowers inside the government, prosecutors and judges. "Everything they can do," even at cost to their positions and careers, is what is needed from those in such strategic positions at this moment, and what we should demand of them, by our own example. Nothing less is appropriate to this constitutional crisis.

Courage is contagious. One way members of the public can awaken courageous initiatives by such people is by confronting them with the spectacle of masses of plain citizens showing their faces together in public streets and squares to express their outrage, their condemnation and rejection of official practices. Demonstrations scheduled for this Saturday in Washington, D.C. can, among other things, encourage Congressional representatives to use their full powers in upcoming investigations to expose and curtail governmental abuses --starting on Monday in the Senate Judiciary Committee on the blatantly illegal and unconstitutional domestic spying by the administration.

Members of the Republican majority have taken the same oath as Democrats and their official witnesses-- to uphold the Constitution. Asking questions that meet with evasion, lies or refusal to answer is not enough to fulfill that oath. Committee powers include subpoenas for testimony and evidence and criminal citations for

contempt or perjury. Illegal practices must not only be identified and condemned, but stopped, and officials who originated and persist in them must be, at the very least, removed from office, and that before 2009. Candidates in primaries and elections this year should be put on notice that their own ability to hold office will depend on their willingness to investigate and to impeach and remove officials, from the president and vice president on down, who endanger our freedom and democracy.

There will be dozens of ways to do that. Demonstrating at the White House on February 4 is a good start.

Daniel Ellsberg made history when as a top Pentagon official, he released the Pentagon Papers, the secret history of the Vietnam War, which exposed government lies going back 20 years. His act of resistance helped galvanize opposition to the war and triggered the events leading to Watergate and the downfall of Richard Nixon.